

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 01585 01 OF 03 091809Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 091701Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3597
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 1585

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, MILI, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: CONVERSATIONS WITH CHAMOUN AND BASHIR

1. SUMMARY: WE HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND BASHIR GEMAYEL. BOTH AGREEABLE TO CEASE-FIRE. CHAMOUN SAYS THERE WILL BE NO MORE OFFENSIVES, BUT LEBANESE FORCES MUST BE ABLE PROTECT CHRISTIAN VILLAGES FROM MASSACRE. WE UNDERSTAND FATAH INTENDS TAKE MARJAYUN AND STOP THERE. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON CAMILLE CHAMOUN AT MAUDE FARAJALLAH'S 1630 LOCAL. HE WAS GOING DIRECTLY FROM OUR MEETING TO SEE PRESIDENT SARKIS TO DISCUSS SITUATION. I SAID I WOULD NOT MINCE WORDS AND WOULD GET RIGHT TO POINT. WHEN LAST I CALLED ON HIM HE HAD REMARKED THAT SITUATION IN SOUTH DID NOT SEEM
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VERY SERIOUS, TO WHICH I HAD REPLIED THAT IT WAS DANGEROUS. I HAD NOT HAD ANY SPECIAL INFORMATION AT THAT POINT, BUT HAD HAD IN MIND SORT OF DEVELOPMENT WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE DURING PAST TEN DAYS. LEBANESE FORCES HAD CROSSED RED LINE WHEN THEY CAPTURED TAIBEH, WHICH WAS PERCEIVED BY PALESTINIANS AS CLOSING OF RING AROUND THEIR ROUTE TO THE EAST. FATAH HAD BECOME ENGAGED AS RESULT AND SYRIANS HAD FACILITATED

THAT INVOLVEMENT. PALESTINIAN REACTION IN PART STIMULATED BY WILD TALK FROM CHAMOUNISTS AND PHALANGE ABOUT CLEANING OUT ALL THE PALESTINIANS SOUTH OF LITANI, AND THEY HAD SEEN TAIBEH CAPTURE AS BEGINNING OF THAT OPERATION.

3. THE LEBANESE FORCES OFFENSIVE HAD BEEN A MISTAKE. LEBANESE FORCES DID NOT HAVE THE WHEREWITHAL TO FOLLOW UP, AND NOW WE HAD TRAGIC SITUATION ON OUR HANDS. HE HAD TOLD ME TO TELL MY GOVERNMENT TO SPEAK FIRMLY TO SYRIANS, ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS. WE HAD TALKED TO ISRAELIS AND THEY HAD INDICATED THEY WOULD TRY TO CALM SITUATION. WE HAD ALSO SPOKEN TO SYRIANS, AND THEIR FIRST REACTION WAS TO TELL US TO SPEAK TO CHAMOUNISTS, WHICH I WAS NOW DOING. SYRIANS THEMSELVES HAD ALSO BEGUN TO MOVE, AS INDICATED BY ARRIVAL OF KHOLI YESTERDAY AND HIS CONVERSATION WITH CHAMOUN AND OTHERS. WE GATHERED SYRIANS WERE MAKING EFFORT TO CALM SITUATION AND BRING ABOUT HALT TO FIGHTING, ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT KNOW WHAT MEASURES THEY HAD TAKEN ON GROUND OR WHAT THEY HAD SAID TO PALESTINIANS.

4. CHAMOUN HAD SAID WE MUST SPEAK FIRMLY. I WAS NOW DOING SO. IF THERE WAS TO BE CEASEFIRE, CHAMOUNISTS AND PHALANGE WOULD HAVE TO RESTRAIN THEIR FOLLOWERS ON GROUND. THEY WOULD ALSO HAVE TO COOPERATE WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS TO PERMIT SPEEDY REBUILDING OF LEBANESE ARMY, BECAUSE THERE WOULD BE NO IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS UNTIL SUCH AN ARMY EXISTED. AS IT WAS, THERE WERE TOO MANY OFFICERS IN THE ARMY WHO THOUGHT THEIR LOYALTY WAS TO CHAMOUN OR GEMAYEL OR FRANGIEH AND NOT TO SARKIS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON. THIS WAS
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AN UNHEALTHY SITUATION.

5. CHAMOUN SAID ARAB STATES HAD UNDERTAKEN SOLEMN OBLIGATION TO IMPLEMENT CAIRO ACCORD, AND THIS WAS BASIS FOR ENTRY INTO LEBANON OF SYRIAN FORCES. UNTIL THOSE ACCORDS IMPLEMENTED, THERE COULD BE NO SECURITY FOR LEBANESE. IN THE SOUTH, THE LEBANESE FORCES AND PNL AND PHALANGE HAD MERELY BEEN TRYING TO PROTECT CHRISTIAN VILLAGES AGAINST MASSACRE OF SORT PALESTINIANS HAD PERPETRATED IN PAST. THEIR PRESENCE THERE PURELY DEFENSIVE. CAPTURE OF TAIBEH HAD BEEN A MISTAKE, PARTICULARLY SINCE IT WAS OF NO VALUE EXCEPT AS PRESENT TO KAMAL AS-ASSAD. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT WAS WHAT HAD TRIGGERED PALESTINIAN REACTION, HOWEVER, BECAUSE IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THEY HAD BEEN MASSING TROOPS IN AREA FOR SOME TIME. THERE WAS, FOR INSTANCE, MYSTERIOUS ARRIVAL OF AIN JALUT BRIGADE. THERE WAS ALSO ROLE BEING PLAYED BY SYRIAN ARTILLERY. ALL OF THIS ADDED UP TO CONCERTED ATTACK PLANNED IN ADVANCE.

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6. I SAID AIN JALUT STORY APPEARED BE UNTRUE, NOR HAD WE
OR ISRAELIS BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH THAT SYRIAN ARTILLERY
ACTUALLY PARTICIPATED IN ATTACKS. IN ANY EVENT, PALESTINIAN
STRENGTH ON GROUND, PARTICULARLY ONCE FATAH INVOLVED, WAS
SO MUCH GREATER THAN LEBANESE FORCES THAT LATTER HAD NO
BUSINESS TRYING TAKE THEM ON, UNLESS THEY EXPECTED BE
SUPPORTED BY FULL FORCE OF ISRAELI ARMY, WHICH I DID NOT
THINK WOULD BE THE CASE. IN THIS SITUATION, IT WOULD BE
MIRACLE IF EFFECTIVE CEASEFIRE COULD BE BROUGHT ABOUT, AND
TO SPEAK OF IMPLEMENTING CAIRO ACCORD IN SOUTH, WHERE SYRIANS
UNABLE ENTER, WAS NOT REALISTIC AT THIS POINT.

7. CHAMOUN SAID HE THOUGHT HE COULD ASSURE ME THERE WOULD
BE NO MORE OFFENSIVES, BUT WHAT COULD WE PROMISE HIM WITH
REGARD TO CHRISTIAN VILLAGES? IF THEY WERE ATTACKED, LEBANESE
FORCES COULD NOT STAND IDLY BY. MARJAYUN WAS NOW UNDER

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ATTACK. IT WAS A CHRISTIAN VILLAGE. WERE ITS INHABITANTS TO BE MASSACRED TOO?

8. I SAID I REGRETTED I COULD GIVE HIM NO ASSURANCES. WE WERE SIMPLY URGING RESTRAINT ON ALL THE PARTIES. WITH REGARD TO MARJAYUN, IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT FATAH WAS DOING THE FIGHTING THERE AND THAT THEY WERE MORE RESPONSIBLE THAN THE OTHERS. BUT THE IMPORTANT THING WAS FOR THE PARTIES TO WORK OUT A CEASEFIRE.

9. CHAMOUN SAID HE WANTED TO BE SURE HE UNDERSTOOD ME. DID I SAY THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES WERE NOT GOING TO IMPLEMENT THE CAIRO ACCORDS? I SAID IT SEEMED THAT THE KUWAITIS AND THE OTHERS HAD GOTTEN COLD FEET, OR HAD BEEN TALKED OUT OF TRYING TO MOVE THE ASF INTO THE CAMPS. WHAT THEY MIGHT DO IN THE BEIRUT AREA IN THE FUTURE I DID NOT KNOW. IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT AT SOME POINT THEY MIGHT TAKE SOME ACTION WITH REGARD TO THE CAMPS. WHAT WAS CLEAR, HOWEVER, WAS THAT THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF THEIR DOING ANYTHING ABOUT THE ACCORDS IN SOUTH LEBANON AS LONG AS THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT PERMIT THEM IN TYRE AND NABATIYAH. THE LEBANESE WOULD BE ABLE TO POLICE THAT AREA ONLY WITH A LEBANESE ARMY. THAT WAS WHY IT WAS VITAL THAT EVERYONE COOPERATE WITH SARKIS IN REBUILDING THE ARMY. CHAMOUN REFLECTED AND THEN SAID IT WOULD TAKE TIME AND MONEY. WHERE WAS THE MONEY COMING FROM? WOULD THE UNITED STATES SUPPLY IT? I SAID THE PROBLEM OF THE ARMY WAS MORE POLITICAL THAN FINANCIAL. IF THE POLITICAL PROBLEM COULD BE SOLVED, THE MONEY WOULD BE FORTHCOMING. WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO HELP A UNITED ARMY, AND I WAS SURE MONEY WOULD BE FOUND ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. CHAMOUN SAID PERHAPS IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO HAVE A NEW ARMY. HE KNEW SARKIS HAD SOME PLANS IN THIS RESPECT, BUT THE MOSLEM WOULD NOT FIRE ON THE PALESTINIAN, AND THEY COULD NOT HAVE MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE SAME UNITS YET, BECAUSE THEY WOULD KILL EACH OTHER. IT WAS TOO EARLY.

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10. I SAID I AGREE WITH HIS SECOND POINT. AS FOR THE FIRST, I HAD YET TO TALK TO A LEBANESE MOSLEM WHO HAD ANY USE FOR THE PALESTINIANS AT THIS POINT. I THOUGHT THAT IF THERE WERE A UNITED ARMY HE WOULD FIND THE MOSLEMS PREPARED TO DEFEND LEBANON. HE SAID, "YES, BUT WILL ANY OF THEM STAND UP IN PUBLIC AND SAY THEY HAVE NO USE FOR THE PALESTINIANS? NO. THAT'S THE POINT" I SAID PROBABLY NOT, BUT THEIR ATTITUDES WERE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THEY WERE AND THIS WAS THE TIME TO MOVE. CHAMOUN SEEMED GRUDGINGLY TO ACCEPT THIS.

1. AS WE WERE LEAVING BUILDING, I TOLD CHAMOUN I HOPED HE WAS BEING CAREFUL ABOUT HIS OWN SECURITY. HE SAID HE WAS.

HE WAS RECEIVING WARNINGS FROM ALL OVER, BUT HE WAS FATALISTIC ABOUT IT. IF HIS NUMBER WAS UP IT WAS UP. HE THEN GOT INTO PEUGOT 505 WITH A RANGEROVER FULL OF ARMED GUARDS LEADING AND TAILING AND TOOK OFF FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

12. EARLIER IN AFTERNOON EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER MOLINEAUX CALLED ON BASHIR GEMAYEL, WHO IS LEADER OF PHALANGE ARMY AND COMMANDER OF "LEBANESE FORCES". HE EXPLAINED US VIEW OF GRAVITY OF SITUATION, TOLD HIM US HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH BOTH SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS, THAT WE UNDERSTOOD SYRIANS TRYING TO COOL SITUATION AND ASKED IF LEBANESE FORCES WOULD COOPERATE IN CEASE FIRE AT PRESENT POSITIONS.

13. BACHIR AGREED ESSENTIALLY TO STANDSTILL IN PRESENT POSITIONS, WITH CERTAIN CAVEATS: A) DEAD LEBANESE FIGHTERS WOULD HAVE TO BE RECOVERED (PARTICULARLY AROUND KHIAM), WHERE THEY ARE NOW IN PALESTINIAN CONTROLLED TERRITORY; B) VILLAGERS WHO FLED THE FIGHTING WOULD HAVE TO BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES; C) HE WOULD NOT RENOUNCE THE LONG-TERM GOAL OF "LIBERATING" ALL LOST LEBANESE TERRITORY FROM THE CONTROL OF THE PALESTINIANS. HE SAID HE WAS WILLING TO GIVE THE ORDER TO HIS TROOPS TO CEASEFIRE, PROVIDED PALESTINIANS DID THE SAME. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH CERTAIN PALESTINIAN LEADERS EARLIER

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THE SAME DAY WHO HAD TOLD HIM THEY HAD BEEN ENOCURAGED BY THE SYRIANS TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE IN THE SOUTH.

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
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14. WE ARE ALSO INFORMED BY RELIABLE SOURCE THAT FATAH SAYS IT WILL TAKE MARJAYUN IN ORDER TEACH CHRISTIANS A LESSON BUT WILL GO NO FURTHER. THEY HOPE TO HAVE THE JOB DONE BY THE END OF THE WEEKEND. GEMAYEL, ON OTHER HAND, TOLD MOLINEAUX THAT HE THOUGHT SITUATION THERE MIGHT STABILIZE AS IT NOW IS, WITH PALESTINIANS IN CONTROL OF MOSLEM HALF AND LEBANESE IN CONTROL OF CHRISTIAN HALF OF TOWN.

15. COMMENT: IT OBVIOUSLY EASY FOR CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL TO PROMISE NO MORE OFFENSIVES BECAUSE THEY ARE VERY MUCH ON THE DEFENSIVE. THEIR FORCES ARE BADLY OUTNUMBERED AND THEY WILL BE VERY LUCKY IF THEY GET TO KEEP WHAT THEY ARE STILL HOLDING AS OF TONIGHT. WHILE THEY ARE GETTING WHAT THEY ASKED FOR, IT IS DISTRESSING THAT FATAH APPARENTLY HAS SYRIAN BLESSING TO TAKE BACK MARJAYUN, WHICH IS GOING TO MEAN PRETTY COMPLETE ISOLATION OF QULAYA, HEADQUARTERS OF
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LEBANESE FORCES. PALESTINIANS LIKELY BECOME UNBEARABLE AS RESULT.

16. IN THE ABSENCE OF INSTRUCTIONS, WE ARE PLANNING TO TAKE NO MORE ACTION BEYOND INFORMING BOUTROS OF ABOVE. TO PURSUE MATTER FURTHER WITH PARTIES HERE LIKELY PUT US UNEQUIOCALLY IN MEDIATING ROLE.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
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